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MAY 15 1953

*From the Editor***Not Can They Read, but Do They Read?**

AS WE APPROACH the summer holiday, our pupils are facing the most significant of all reading tests. If we ever get the returns on this test, we will have some measure of our own effectiveness as reading teachers.

The test I refer to is not listed among the standardized tests. The returns don't come back to us in easily manipulated numerical scores.

The Vacation Test won't tell us how well children *can* read. But it will tell us whether they *do* read when they are on their own.

When the young child first learns to walk and run, his parents rejoice. But if they should find that, left to his own devices, he never chooses to walk or run, they would be gravely concerned.

There are many among us — both adults and children — who *can* read, but who never choose to. Like the one who can walk but never does, we live the life of the paralytic whose world is limited by his handicap.

Through the school year, children's reading is rather carefully directed and evaluated. Then comes vacation when children are reading on their own. For some few it may be a time when library cards will be quickly filled up as more and more books are devoured. At the other extreme, there will be children who, consciously or unconsciously, rule out reading as school work inappropriate to the

leisure time activities of vacation.

The child who becomes a summer book worm may be reading too much for his social development. But the child who doesn't choose to read may be missing an opportunity for personal growth and deep satisfaction.

In the last weeks of the school year there are many ways we can help children prepare for their vacation reading. Many teachers use this period to broaden children's acquaintance with library books. They are encouraged to discuss their favorites and to compile lists of books they want to explore during vacation. Many schools arrange to have the school library open on certain days through the summer so that reading may continue without interruption. Public libraries are encouraged to set up special book displays and to arrange story hours for various age groups. Community playground leaders are assisted in setting up a "Book Adventure" program to encourage continuous fun with reading.

Through such a school-community vacation project, children will see that reading is not merely the subject for school drill and test, but the source of real joy and deep satisfaction. They may grow from children who can read into children who do read with genuine pleasure.

Nancy Larrick, Editor

The Psychology of Skill Building

by Bertha B. Friedman
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THE TITLE of this article implies that there is sufficient similarity in the way skills are learned to make it possible to discuss the building of a skill without naming any particular skill. It implies also that the discussion is applicable to all types of skills including both motor and non-motor skills. This is in contrast to the view that the most important factor in skill teaching is to pass on to pupils knowledge of the techniques of the particular skill to be learned by imposing practice sessions of these techniques.

There is much more to the successful teaching of a skill than getting children to practice it during special class periods. Other important ingredients are the learner's understanding of what the skill is, his feelings in connection with the skill, and his ability to undertake the kind of practice which the successful learning of the skill necessitates. Practice not considered in relation to the pupil's feelings and to his understanding of what he is practicing leads to success in only hit-or-miss fashion.

In many cases where the factor of motivation is recognized as being essential to skill learning, the error is made of thinking that there are two steps to the process — motivation followed by practice.

The ingredients necessary for skill building cannot be considered as steps following one after the other. They

This is one of three articles in this issue dealing with various aspects of the development of the skill of word recognition in reading.

are, rather, involved in and with each other. Feelings are involved in every part of the skill-building process and must be considered throughout. One must have some idea of the skill before one begins initial practice, but one must also continue to gain ideas of the higher levels of the skill as one is ready to move practice up to those levels. Practice may increase or decrease interest in the skill, and interest generally makes the pupil increase practice. However, for purposes of understanding how skills are built, it may be helpful to consider in turn each of the main factors related to skill building.

Understanding What the Skill Is

Teachers generally take it for granted that their pupils know what reading is. In the United States in 1953, the vast majority of children entering the First Grade do understand that the written symbols stand for words. They have encountered enough reading situations in the first five or six years of their lives to have gained this beginning idea.

A broader conception of reading is

not as universally gained without the school's help since reading is not as easily observable as are motor skills. The way in which written symbols translate into words can be comprehended as one listens to oral reading. To some children this translation is all that there is to reading. They should also know that one can ponder over these words and relate them in various ways to get many meanings from them. There are numerous ways of reacting to reading material, and the school must recognize that a child's out-of-school culture will not necessarily introduce him to even the most important ways. It is interesting to note that quite a number of classroom teachers when first introduced to the Reading Test titled "Reading to Predict the Outcome of Given Events"¹ confessed that this was a sub-skill of reading that they had never thought of. They simply did not know how many of their pupils were aware of and practiced this sub-skill.

In classrooms where there is little discussion of what is read, new approaches to reading are not shown to pupils. Where the discussion is entirely and always carried on by the pupils alone with not even the avenue of discussion set by the teacher, understanding of what reading is may remain limited. In teaching skills, a teacher may make the mistake of setting examples which the pupils must copy exactly. However, leaving out the good examples altogether also

hampers learning. No one can create in his lifetime all that the race has learned to date about a skill.

Good learning goes on where there are good models to observe — models which can then be copied intelligently with whatever unique adaptations fit a particular learner. The teacher cannot take herself out of the teaching situation at the very points where the pupils have the least ability to further one another's learning.

The school should also help children see the various ways in which reading functions in life. Many a child thinks of reading mainly as "something you learn in school." With such a narrow view of reading, no high reading interest or skill can be built up. A mature understanding of reading takes time to develop. The job cannot be finished in the elementary school, and there are still some reading approaches that will remain for the college to introduce.

Feelings Towards the Skill

All the basic feelings of a person can be tied up with a skill that he is expected to learn. Teachers do not have control of all the factors that bring about these feelings and how they relate themselves to reading.

In some cases the school has sent non-readers to a psychological clinic where the psychiatrist treated child and parents for difficulties arising out of their family life and gave no treatment specifically for the reading problem. Nor did the teacher change his way of teaching or reacting to the child. Yet the child gradually made enough change in his attitude towards school and towards reading to make

1. Gates Basic Reading Tests: Type B . . . Reading to Predict the Outcome of Given Events. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

unusual progress in that skill.

This is not to say, however, that the school's emotional atmosphere and the specific ways in which the teacher handles the children cannot help or hinder the work of the psychiatrist where one enters the picture. Where there is no psychiatrist to treat deep emotional difficulties stemming from the home problems of the child, the teacher cannot take his place.

Nevertheless, one must remember that the school itself forms a large part of the child's life and as such can influence other parts of his life since it can influence his feelings about himself. The teacher can have a great deal of influence as to whether the child will tie up reading (or another skill that is being taught) with his positive feelings about himself rather than with his negative feelings. Is his reading gaining him satisfaction or thwarting him for his basic drives?

When reading is felt as a satisfaction, it entails such feelings as the following, all of which draw the child to practice the activity and to gain skill in its performance.

This activity is fun. To have fun is a very big drive of childhood. Few children voluntarily engage in an activity because it is good for them or because it will be important in their adult life. However, since it takes time to learn the skill, they must begin the learning in childhood. One of the appeals of the comics is that they are read for enjoyment, not for study, not for learning to read, not for finding answers to test questions.

Many pre-school children do learn from their parents that books are fun.

They may even begin with an absorbing interest in books only to find in Grade One that books no longer have interesting stories and that the emphasis is on learning to read rather than on having fun reading. Some teachers do tell their children that reading is fun, but they do not arrange for the children to enjoy reading, through the materials used or through the manner in which the reading period is conducted. Where parents do not help the child have enjoyable reading experiences at home, he may experience reading only as a chore to be done as the adults require it of him.

This is an activity in which I am successful. While successful reading may not be felt as enjoyable, reading that is felt as failure is never felt as enjoyable and necessarily loses whatever fun appeal it had.

The feeling of success does draw people to keep engaging in the activity, but the teacher's emphasis on success as the incentive to reading carries with it the fear of punishment for failure. Even for poorer readers the fear of failure can be greatly de-emphasized if they have many opportunities to read where the teacher pays more attention to what they can read than to the errors they make. Certainly children must be helped with their errors, but not every time they read is the proper time to point to the learner's error. The atmosphere should not be such that the children feel that failure is always lurking in the wings ready to pounce on stage and become the central character.

It is difficult to de-emphasize failure and emphasize success when the

reading material is in the form of a test (whether called so or not). Most workbooks are nothing more than test items. As a matter of fact some are identical in form with tests written by the same authors.

Many primary grade children find it too much of a strain to be in these test situations day after day. Mistakes are not only made — they are pointed out, a permanent mark is put beside them, they are counted, they can easily be compared with the number of errors that other children make.

We have only to watch children at play in their own games to see that most are ready to go on playing in spite of errors they make, but that many quit as soon as errors are counted and scores kept. It takes time for children to reach a stage of emotional maturity where they accept failure as a natural part of life and learning. They will not be helped to reach this stage if they are exposed to failure at too early an age.

It should be obvious that the teacher cannot give the learner a feeling of success merely by adding at the end of his work such a remark as "That was very good." The child will get his feelings through the whole manner in which she handles his errors and those of the other children. A method popular with teachers in the First Grade classes of one large city only a few years ago was to have all the children stand for the reading lesson. This consisted of word reading. As soon as a child made an error he sat down and had no further turns. To be thus "put out of the group" for an error is not an experience which will tend to result in a proper atti-

tude towards the making of mistakes nor in a love for reading.

Provision should be made for the learner to show off his ability rather than his inability, thus allowing for public success. An alert teacher can create such opportunities even for the slower learners in the class. There is such a large variety of interesting easy reading materials that no group of children can possibly read all the materials available for the lower levels. Thus the poorer reader can read something well to the class which is new to all and enjoyable to most. The pupils of one Fourth Grade class who had practically no outside-the-school reading experiences and whose school reading experiences were very narrow thoroughly enjoyed "Angus and the Cat,"² a book generally classed at the nursery school level.

When the learner feels he is accepted as a person and that his difficulties do not reduce his acceptance, he is better able to stick to a task through difficulty and not to feel it as failure. The way in which children are grouped in classes or in groups within classes may affect this feeling, particularly when it is obvious that the brighter groups are favored. Even when a particular teacher is most sympathetic to an all-slow class, children may gain a feeling of failure through their very classification. Reading groups within a heterogeneous class may bring much less of this result because the children are not grouped as slow in all ways, just in reading. However,

2. Marjorie Flack: "Angus and the Cat." Doubleday.

some teachers keep these groups separate for almost everything. This daily face-to-face feeling of not being as good as the others in the room can hardly be expected to result in a feeling of success even when the children are given reading materials which they can attack successfully. One can feel that one is publicly labeled a failure even when one is not publicly called a failure.

This is an activity that I can engage in with other people. The social drive is definitely a great aid to enthusiasm for baseball. One plays it with friends, one goes with others to see it played, one talks about it to others. It has an accepted place in child culture and in adult culture.

Reading is not as closely interwoven with the social drive. Indeed, many parents when trying to encourage reading try to discourage the social drive. Their oft-repeated cry to their children is, "Why don't you stay home and read?"

Perhaps teachers could do more to relate reading to the social drive of their pupils. This is particularly important in the upper grades and in high school when the social drive is very strong and when satisfaction with the mere ability of being able to read is on the decrease. If book discussion could be made popular among young people the way discussion of television programs is popular, more reading would be done.

At least lively book discussion periods can be encouraged in the classroom. Teachers can suggest to parents that reading interest may increase if books are part of the family conversation at meals and other times.

Many parents and baby-sitters do an excellent job of making books the medium of a very satisfying social-affectionate relationship between adult and pre-school child while the child is being read to. If learning to read for oneself is going to mean the loss of such good situations, some negative feeling is bound to be directed towards learning to read.

Besides discussion of books, reading can be a social activity when plays are read aloud (not memorized). Unfortunately there are not many plays that are suitable for reading by children. However, children can read many books in an attempt to find one which they will agree to adapt to dramatic form. Much social activity is involved here. Books can also be used socially if the information in them is functional to the interests of the group. Again the variety of material provided rather than any teaching method becomes the incentive to reading.

The use of the experience chart as reading material for the primary grades allows the children to share experiences by way of reading. This makes reading a social experience as well as an intellectual experience. It has the further value of making each child whose name specifically appears on the chart feel an important noticed member of the group. Since it is in reading that this satisfactory situation occurs, a favorable attitude towards reading is likely to result.

This is an activity which helps me feel autonomous — a person in my own right.

A person feels that his skills are very much a part of him. When you

can do something you also *are* something. The skill need not be one in which your success is acknowledged. The satisfaction relates more to your independence in the activity than to your high skill in it. Nevertheless the large amount of practice with satisfaction generally brings improvement. For some overprotected children, reading is the one activity they are permitted to do independently, and they may therefore read a great deal. Overprotected children who accept their dependence may not be able to work without making social contact with an adult every few minutes. They are thus unable to engage in continuous without-a-break reading for any length of time. If a teacher tries to help such a child lose some of his dependence, she must remember that the change will come about only slowly and with many regressions to the earlier degree of dependence. It will at times be better for the teacher to accept the child's temporary regression rather than to emphasize that there has been regression.

When little attempt is made to have the classroom be a place where each child has the opportunity to have satisfying feelings, reading may become the avenue for a release of hostile feelings to authority. Where parental authority is hostile, the child often classifies the teacher with the parents unless teachers give him strong evidence to the contrary. When reading is presented as "This is something you're going to learn and I'm going to see to it that you do," there is a tendency for the child who is already hostile to adults to balk completely.

You can make a child open his reader, but you cannot make him learn to read. At least here he does not have to give in to you. This can be much the same situation as the child who will not eat. The more he is scolded and forced to eat, the more he becomes a problem eater. In reading, less forcing is possible. Sitting still may be commanded, but attention is needed for the child to learn. Much more could be said about the relation of feelings to reading, but it is necessary now to consider whether the child has the ability, other than emotional, to profit from reading instruction.

Prerequisite Abilities

There has been a good deal of emphasis in the past two decades on the need for proper eye development and language development before reading instruction is given to a particular child. Now emphasis is also being placed on the need for attention to have developed to a sufficiently long span for the child to hear the instruction with some concentration.

Not all six year olds have this attention readiness. Some are too emotionally disturbed to be able to maintain attention on things outside themselves. We do not know what causes others to be comparatively slow in this development.

Quite a number of children who can pay attention to the adult who is speaking to them directly cannot pay attention when they are only one of a large group to whom the teacher is explaining. Some can pay attention in groups of three or four but no larger. This relationship be-

tween attention and the size of the group needs to be considered when the teacher is working out her methods of teaching a skill.

It might be better if we always thought of prerequisite abilities necessary to profit from instruction in a particular level of reading rather than trying to adapt instruction to "general mental ability" or I.Q. Emphasis on the I.Q. has often kept us from looking at the child's abilities right now to see what instruction can be profited from right now and where the child can make probable advancement. The diagnosis in terms of specific present readinesses and unreadinesses gives clues as to what specific instruction can be given. The I.Q., even when it is a reliable measurement for that child, does not give you such indication though it may tell more about long-term possibilities.

Practice and Its Guidance

One of the best ways to practice a skill is to have it so tied up with other activities that one is not even aware that he is drilling himself in the skill. In newer school programs reading is used much more in this functional way than it used to be.

The skills which children learn well by themselves are generally those which they can practice, or try to practice, in the same general manner in which skilled performers carry out the activity. Teachers, however, often introduce practice activities that do not form any part of the real activity. One does not read by means of flash cards, but these are used in school reading drills. When one reads a short story one does not orient one-

self to it by a set of multiple-choice questions, but this is a drill method used in schools. To what extent are such special laboratory practices justified?

In reading we generally introduce the most artificial drills in the lowest grades. Possibly we ought to do it the other way round. There needs to be more investigation along this line. Perhaps practice in the primary grades should consist largely of reading a book in continuous fashion with whatever aid is needed to get the task done. In the higher grades where the children are ready to become more precise about their skill, instruction might take the form of special drill at the point of experienced difficulty with continuous reading being encouraged as an independent activity.

At any level of reading it is important that practice be given on difficult aspects of the skill as that skill functions in life. In some schools children are always told what to look for when they read a passage. Thus they get no practice in reading for meaning when no attitude toward the article is given them. Before a teacher is satisfied with the skill drills he uses, he should make sure that there is drill on all the sub-aspects of the skill that children have difficulty with and that there is not special drill on those aspects learned quickly and well through general reading. Where there are neat practice exercises available, teachers tend to use them even when the children have no need for them. Such exercises not only do not advance reading skill, but they may so reduce interest in reading that they

actually serve to retard the development of skill.

It is thus seen that the planning of a reading curriculum must be related to objectives and to foreseeable outcomes. Methods cannot be introduced piecemeal as they hit the fancy

of the teacher. Methods cannot be judged valuable merely because they allow a reading lesson to "run smoothly." Long-term interest and learning are the criteria by which any methods of teaching a skill should be judged.

New Local Reading Councils Are Being Formed

The persons listed below have requested information about forming local councils of the I.C.I.R.I. Others who are interested are asked to get in touch with the one in their area who is now considering formation of a council. Additional names of interested persons may be found listed in the January 1953 issue on page 14.

Arizona, Leona Heinle, Mesa Public Schools, 15 W. Second Ave., Mesa.

California, James C. Bradley, 427 N. Euclid Ave., Ontario.

Enid Hause, P. O. Box 395, Chula Vista.

Canada, Marion Sutherland, 531, 28th Ave., N. W., Calgary, Alberta.

Delaware, John Branisel, Claymount Public School, Claymount.

Maryland, Grace H. Lyons, P. O. Box 634, Easton.

Mary B. Neal, Sec'y., SMR Club, 8 Swann Court, Indian Head.

Massachusetts, Sister Josephina, Supervisor, Mt. St. Joseph Academy, Brighton 35.

Michigan, Dorothy Hauser, 1424 Wilcox Park Drive, S.E., Grand Rapids 6.

Missouri, Joe M. Combs, Washington & St. John, Florissant.

Lora P. Hawkins, 2501 Tracy, Kansas City.

New Jersey, Florence L. Cittadino, 643 Ocean Ave., Rear, Long Branch.

Rose E. Wilson, Roosevelt School, Livingston.

New York, Lillian W. Lorentz, P. S. 219, 1342 Union St. Brooklyn 13.

Rachel L. Stensland, 5 Mathews Ave., Staten Island 10.

North Carolina, Alma Browning, Box 423, Lake Junaluska.

Mary W. Hall, 115 Spring St., Oxford.

Louise Hunt, Box 325, W.C.T.C., Cullowhee.

Ohio, Elizabeth M. Lane, R. 9 Box 665, Dayton 4.

Oregon, Grace Bentall, 4707 S. E. River Drive, Portland 22.

South Carolina, Nina Collins, 1105-5th Ave., Conway.

Rosana F. Dukes, 120 Charles Ave., Kingstree.

Texas, Dorothy Kendall Bracken, School of Education, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Ollie Markham, R. 2 B. 454, Texarkana.

Gertie M. Napper, Principal, Napper School, Pharr.

Elneita W. Stewart, 2602 Eagle St., Houston 4.

Vermont, Ruth M. Andrus, Barre City Schools, Barre.

The Conflict Over Phonics Is Still Raging

by Alvina Treut Burrows
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"WE'RE TEACHING phonics in the first grade and we're proud of it," the new elementary school principal announced in a somewhat defiant tone to the visiting language specialist.

"I believe in a good phonics drill before every reading lesson in my third grade," declared one teacher. "The children enjoy it, too," she added in a tone to prove that she thought this the final justification anyone might need.

"How can they expect children to learn to read when they don't even know the sounds of the letters?" queried one parent anxiously. "In my day that's how we began and *we* all learned to read."

Almost as frequently heard as these defensive declarations or anxious questions are denials in equally convincing tones.

"Teaching phonics is old fashioned," say some. "It died with dunce caps and hickory switches."

"My second graders love to read and I'd hate to slow them down with sounding out letters," stated a second-grade teacher who was concerned about her pupils' love for books and reading.

"My child says 'B-buh' which anyone knows *b* doesn't say," expostulated an angry parent at a large meeting of parents and teachers. "She has to write single letters on a page, when

One approach to word recognition is by the teaching of phonics. Another—"The Use of Context Clues"—is discussed by Dr. Austin on page 18.

she is anxious to write stories and letters to people. How can anyone teach a child to distort the beautiful English language, to mouth buh-oh-ah-tuh when she already knows the word *boat* and has been in or near boats most of her life," added this parent concerned for the naturalness of language and her own child's interest in reading and writing.

It is paradoxical that in this twentieth century after several decades of research in this specific phase of teaching reading, and after many more decades of both child study and language study that this conflict should still be raging. And raging it is! Even in quarters where the scientific attitude is cited as a goal of the curriculum for children, heated emotion is often substituted for scrutiny of facts. One can only assume in some instances that the weighing of objective evidence is held as a value for children, but not for the professional staff! And few specific teaching problems are illuminated by the abundance of evidence which has been established in relation to the

value and limitations of phonics instruction.

Evidence of Research In Regard to Phonics Teaching

What is the evidence of research in regard to this emotionally charged question of whether or not to teach phonics in elementary schools? What are the practices of artistic classroom teachers, who along with teaching recognition skills, engender that fondness for reading and eagerness for ideas which are the hallmark of well-read persons?

Research evidence, summarized and viewed critically, reveals a thread of consistency which is the more convincing because the studies were carried on by investigators in different parts of the country working independently of one another and often from quite different premises. The accumulated findings resulting from twenty years of varied investigation, when looked at with a view to finding relationships, point conclusively to a sound case for teaching phonics but *not* in isolation and *not* as an approach to beginning reading. (3) The role of phonics instruction is that of sharpening and refining word perception after the beginner has made the essential adaptation of reading for meaning. And even then, the job which phonic instruction can safely tackle must be in close relationship to what the youngster wants to read and at least partially understands. Sounds without meanings are not language. So heated is this controversy about phonics as a method of teaching children to read that some of the research studies leading to the above

conclusions are presented here in detail, so that administrators, teachers, and parents who are seeking clarity can readily resort to facts on which to base opinions.

An extensive study of phonics training was done by Agnew who investigated the effects of timing of phonetic teaching upon both oral and silent reading. (1) The reading achievements of 230 children in the first three grades of elementary schools in Raleigh, North Carolina were checked against the amounts of phonic instruction to which they had been exposed. A battery of tests was used to measure achievement. In Grade One, large amounts of phonics seemed detrimental to smooth oral reading. In Grade Two the effect seemed slightly positive. In Grade Three accurate oral rendition seemed to be assisted. But conspicuously and importantly, it was found that large amounts of phonic instruction were a deterrent to silent reading comprehension in all three grades. A later controlled comparison with children in Durham having consistently more phonic instruction than did the children of Raleigh confirmed these same findings, that isolated phonics made no positive contribution to silent reading comprehension even in large doses. However, it was shown that the oral reading skills of word recognition and pronunciation were increased by longer periods of phonetic study.

Dolch and Bloomster checked the correlation between mental age and phonic ability (4). They found a marked agreement. Bright children in Grades One and Two, with some

exceptions, showed considerable ability to acquire phonic power. Children of low mental age did not acquire phonic ability. Children of less than 6 years mental age failed to acquire such ability even though exposed to the same amounts and kinds of teaching as were the somewhat more mature children.

Garrison and Heard, working with four classes of children from the time they entered first grade through three years, found that the children learned greater independence in pronunciation than did the no-phonics group (5). They found that bright children were helped more than dull ones by phonics instruction, that both bright and dull groups having phonetic instruction lost more over summer vacations than did similar groups having no phonics. The investigators concluded that much of phonics instruction should be deferred until second or third grade.

Tate, in two studies of the kinds of phonic instruction and their effects upon reading, found that isolated phonic instruction improved word recognition but not comprehension (7). In a later study with Herbert and Zeman he found that incidental phonics, that is, phonics related to words the children were trying to read and could not get by other methods, was superior to both isolated phonics and to no-phonics methods in aiding silent reading comprehension (8). Russell's studies of phonics related to reading and writing in a good language arts program confirmed the positive contribution of related phonics to reading comprehension (6).

Other studies have been done and

are interesting to the student of language but those noted point up a pattern consistent with the remainder. Most briefly stated, the findings show that *incidental phonics assistance related to reading the children are purposefully engaged in is effective after a minimum mental age of seven years has been attained.*

The emotionally based position of being all for or all against phonics is untenable in view of these impartial findings. It is obvious that an "either-or" argument in relation to phonics teaching is a denial of the scientific attitude by professional persons. Supervisors and teachers intent upon a method because of an enthusiast's zeal for it need to be wary. Extravagant claims of complete success for any one system or method of teaching reading are always suspect. Teacher enthusiasm and extra time can often achieve superior results which are then attributed to the method being praised. Objective comparison of methods must control such variables and others which are not here discussed.

Classroom Procedures Fostering Phonics Related to Reading

How can the foregoing conclusions be put into everyday practice by teachers in busy classrooms? Perhaps the best answer lies in the teaching procedures already in use by a goodly number of successful teachers. Some of the more productive ones will be presented with brief discussion as to the kinds of assistance they render to the varied needs of children growing differently into the control of printed symbols. Questions frequently asked by teachers and some answers to them

are reported on below:

1. *How should I use phonics with my beginning readers?*

While fostering readiness for reading, using children's immediate and vivid experiences as the basis for charts, take pains not to fracture words, but to enhance the experiences underlying words. Enjoy the humor and music of words in verse from "Cocka-doodle doo, My dame has lost her shoe" — to the "measles and sneezles" of Christopher Robin. Isolated, meaningless sounds are not communication. But when children ask what a letter is or how to spell a word, either parents or teachers should tell them. Curiosity about written symbols is entirely wholesome.

2. *How do I know when my pupils are ready to start work in phonics?*

The usual symptoms are children's great interest in words, and pride in knowing some by sight. When they point out words that sound alike or begin alike or look alike, it is fairly safe to assume that a sufficient potential for visual and auditory discrimination has been achieved to warrant some teaching of symbols.

Conversely, if a group of children who seem ready are brought together to examine an old chart for words that begin like *cake* and *cookie* some of the children may be entirely bewildered. Usually it is wiser to let these few wait longer — maybe a month or two — before trying again. Experiences in experimenting, building, painting, reading, writing, dictating, telling, will help more than a pursuit as abstract as linking mean-

ingless sounds with, to the immature ones, meaningless hieroglyphics.

3. *What should I do with the children in my second grade who just can't remember what any letters sound like in words?*

Forget all about phonics for weeks or even months. If, at this early age, the children really can't "remember" then memory has been taxed too soon, or the children have been given so much phonetic analysis that they are confused, or bored, or both. Go on with a good language arts program with lots of opportunity for small informal group discussion and dramatics. Sing, tell stories, read stories, develop experience charts about tangible things. Then, after reading becomes a normal interest again, take one salient word, such as *Mickie*, the pet white mouse, or *Stuffy*, the class hamster, or some other word rich in association to the group. Make up some other names that begin the same way. Find other real names of real children in the class and elsewhere that begin with the initial consonant chosen. Build a chart¹ with these words, and get the children to make illustrations.

4. *What phonic elements should I teach?*

Start with beginning consonants, not only because they appear easier for children to learn and to use, but also because they have been found

1. See "The Use of Charts in Primary Grades" by the Curriculum Division, Madison Public Schools, Madison, Wisconsin, 1949.

most needed by older readers in need of clinical help (2).

Later find the same consonants at the ends of words and within words. Then locate initial two-letter blends (Ch, pl); initial three-letter blends (str, thr); vowel sounds, long and short only, in words such as *candy*, *cane*.

This sequence of phonetic elements should be spread over about two years for many children. Some who were slow to begin identifying sounds and their symbols will need more time. They, too, can become successful, satisfied readers. On the other hand, some very able children who push ahead rapidly into the world of books and reading make these discoveries for themselves in much less time. They need only teacher confirmation of their phonetic discoveries, and many challenging books to read and situations in which reading is appropriate.

5. What should I do to help my fifth-graders who can't work out a new word at all?

First, have as thorough a check on sight and vision as can be arranged for these particular children. If a large number of the class have such serious limitations, gather them together and use some of the most enticing words from social studies or science content for analysis. Use words dignified by adult associations — *magnetic* or *ignition*, or *conservation*, or whatever has adult importance to the children in their current interests. Teach initial consonants by listing several words with the same beginning letter and syllabicate the

words. Develop about one phonics chart a week showing an initial consonant and words beginning with it. Use illustrations. Add new words to the chart as they are discovered. Encourage all signs of independence.

6. What help does phonics offer my bright children in middle grades, children who are already good readers?

Children who derive their own generalizations about the phonetic logic of English — and the lack of it — need little help in attacking new words. They more often profit from analysis stressing accurate enunciation, finding root words and their origins, and how the root meanings have been changed over the years. They can profit from some help in using the dictionary for syllabication when writing, and a very few can learn new pronunciations from the dictionary. But diacritical markings are difficult for even very able elementary school children.

7. If a child is reading a sentence aloud and can't make out a word, should I tell him or have him work the word out phonetically?

Tell him the word if he is a beginning reader or if he has made little progress so far. It might also be wise to help him if you have observed that he cannot attend to reading very long, if the content is difficult and you are afraid he will lose the continuity, or if the child is reading to a group for enjoyment. Later, at the end of the page or passage, or at another time in a small study group you can have him work out the word phonetically. If however, you sense that

the child can get the word quickly, before he loses the all-important idea, have him work out the word phonetically then and there.

8. *Are there some words in English which phonics won't help children to recognize?*

There are many which must be learned visually in context because of lack of phonetic consistency. Such words as *one, two, sugar, ocean, busy, was, says*, are a few of them.

9. *What should I say to parents who insist that children began to read by phonetic methods and that their children could and should?*

Report to them in clear simple terms that while phonetic analysis helps with oral reading it helps with comprehension only if the fundamental skills of reading for ideas has been started first. Show them that saying words is not reading thoughts.

Point out that thousands of young men were turned down as illiterates in World Wars I and II and that many of them, particularly in World War I, had come up through the schools in an era when phonics teaching was a blanket requirement.

Ask them to recall that many of their peers did not learn to read and dropped out of school. Enumerate some of the ways of symbolizing the *sh* sound, *Ch* (Chicago), *ti* nation, *si* mansion, *c* ocean, *s* sugar, *ss* tissue.

Point out how you do use phonetic analysis to sharpen clear hearing and seeing of words.

Show how they, too, can help by reading to their children, listening appreciatively to their reading, by writ-

ing notes and messages to them whenever reasonable, by sanely pointing out phonetic elements when those clues help the young learners to get words to make sense in what they are reading.

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Context Clues Aid Word Recognition

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CONTEXT CLUES have long been considered as valuable aids to word recognition and meaning. Unfortunately, the extent of guidance in the use of context has frequently been to encourage the reader to "guess" what the unfamiliar word might be from the meaning of the sentence. As a result of this common procedure, few pupils have developed adequate skill in using this important technique. On the basis of research, McKee¹ states that the average child in fourth grade can employ the context successfully to identify the meaning of an unknown word in his textbooks about once in three times. If this finding is typical for children throughout the country, guidance is needed in the development of the ability to discover and use clues to the meaning supplied by the context.

Types of Context Clues

Some progress has been made in identifying the types of context clues which should receive emphasis. Since it is important that the classroom teacher be able to recognize the various kinds of contextual aids in order to help pupils gain a full understanding of them, a brief summary of some of the principal ones is included.

1. Paul McKee, *The Teaching of Reading*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948. p. 73.

The article by Bertha B. Friedman on page 4 and the one by Alvina T. Burrows on page 12 offer additional information related to this subject.

McCullough^{2,3} has suggested seven common types of context clues that should be developed:

1. *Definition.* The unknown word may be defined in the passage. For example: Bill and Ted like to play together. They are good (*friends*).

2. *Experience.* Children may rely upon their past concrete experience to supply the new word. For example: Susan gave her cat some (*milk*) to drink.

3. *Comparison or contrast.* The unknown word may be compared or contrasted with something known. For example: The water in the pool was not deep; it was (*shallow*).

4. *Synonym.* This type of clue consists of a known synonym for the unfamiliar word. For example: In the museum there was a tiny ship. It was a (*miniature*) of the Mayflower.

2. Constance M. McCullough, "Context Aids in Reading," *Elementary English Review*, XX (April, 1943), 140-143.

3. Constance M. McCullough, "Recognition of Context Clues in Reading," *Elementary English Review*, XXII (Jan., 1945), 1-5, 38.

5. *Familiar expression.* This clue requires a knowledge of common expressions or idioms which may be anticipated easily before they are completed by the speaker. For example: The little boy was as busy as a (*bee*).

6. *Summary.* In this clue the new word may summarize the ideas that precede it. For example: Tom saw a band march down the street. Lions and tigers in red and gold wagons came behind the band. Big gray elephants followed the wagons. Funny clowns rode in a cart drawn by a white pony. The (*circus*) had come to town.

7. *Reflection of a mood or situation.* The general tone of the sentence or paragraph sometimes suggests a clue to the new word. For example: The boy tried to be brave when he saw the house burning, but his knees shook. He really felt very (*frightened*).

As can be seen in the above illustrations, context clues rarely exist in isolation; there is some overlapping. In the primary grades they can be used as an active attack on words in response to the teacher's suggestion rather than with emphasis on the names of the seven types.

Artley⁴ has indicated the importance of typographical and structural aids as clues to word meaning. Typographical clues such as quotation marks, italics, and bold face type may call attention to new words. Although these devices have no value in determining meaning, they do em-

phasize the fact that the word is probably an unfamiliar one. Other aids such as parentheses, footnotes, or glossary references provide an explanation which is superior to the dictionary because they refer to the word in its context. For example:

1. *Typographical Aids*

a) quotation marks—Travelers on the desert may see a "mirage" of palm trees and water.

b) italics—Travelers on the desert may see a *mirage* of palm trees and water.

c) capital letters—Travelers on the desert may see a MIRAGE of palm trees and water.

d) parentheses—Travelers on the desert may see a mirage (a scene which is really somewhere else) of palm trees and water.

e) footnote—Travelers on the desert may see a mirage* of palm trees and water. At bottom of page *mirage—an appearance of a scene which is really somewhere else, due to conditions of the air which make it reflect images of distant objects.

2. *Structural Aids*

a) appositive phrase or clause — Much of the arctic region is covered by *tundra*, a treeless plain.

b) non-restrictive phrase or clause — Much of the arctic region is covered by *tundra*, which remains frozen even in summer.

c) interpolated phrase or clause — *Tundra*—a frozen, treeless plain—covers much of the arctic region.

The teacher should guide children to understand that commas and dashes are often helpful clues which tell them to go slowly and look for meaning.

4. A. Sterl Artley, "Teaching Word Meaning Through Context," *Elementary English Review*, XX (February, 1943) 68-74.

Developing Readiness

During the readiness period the major task of the teacher becomes one of helping children to develop the attitude that reading is a thinking process from which meaning is to be gained. During all stages of reading progress, there are several things which the teacher can do to develop the attitude of requiring meaning from reading.

1. The teacher can check to be certain that the material she reads to the children will make sense to them. The material must be adjusted in interest level and vocabulary to the experience background of the children.

2. The teacher must establish background for what the children will hear in the story. Where direct verbal contextual aids are not provided, the teacher should promote understandings through excursions, field trips, pictures, films, slides, exhibits, models, and the like.

3. Specific purposes for listening (or reading) should be established by the guide questions the teacher asks. The more meaning children can be led to anticipate, the more meaning they will obtain.

4. The teacher can provide much opportunity for practice in which children make choices based upon meaning clues.

Just as readiness is essential in every aspect of development in reading, so is it necessary to establish readiness for the use of context clues. Actually, building readiness for the use of context clues should be started in the kindergarten with training in the use of pictures and oral context. The fol-

lowing activities are merely suggestive of those which have been helpful:

Use of Pictures. Valuable and obvious clues to meaning are found in the pictures which accompany the stories read to children during the readiness stage. The teacher may point out to the children that a clue to an unfamiliar word may be found in the picture by saying: "When I read the next sentence, I will leave out one important word." After the sentence has been read, the teacher may show a picture and say, "This picture may help you to think of the missing word. Can you tell us what word is missing?"

Use of Oral Context. Occasionally during the oral reading of a story, the teacher may say, "When I read the next sentence, I will leave out one important word." After the sentence has been read, the teacher may say, "Think what the sentence has told us. Can you tell us what word is missing?"

On another occasion, the teacher may say, "Soon you will hear the word Many of you probably do not know what the word means. As I read the next part of the story, try to find out what means by using the other words to help you." Class discussion following the reading should aid in deciding the meaning of . . . and in locating the words or ideas which helped to explain it.

Later, when children have developed auditory recognition of words which begin alike and are able to discriminate between like and unlike beginnings, the teacher may add an additional clue to be used in conjunc-

tion with the context. She may say, "Tom rode his . . . down the street." She continues by saying, "Who can tell us what Tom was riding in this sentence? The answer begins like *bed*, *baby*, and *big*."

Riddles may be used to develop an awareness of context, also. For example:

I walk and walk.

I go up and down the street.

I have a big bag.

I drop something in a box.

Who am I?

postman fireman farmer

To encourage children to use meaning clues the teacher may introduce a new story by saying: "There are several animals in our story today. See if you can guess what animals I shall read about. One is very large. He has big ears and a long trunk. Who is he?" Continue in a similar manner until the other animals have been introduced.

Reading Activities

Several types of specific activities may be employed to promote skill in the use of context clues. These may center about the blackboard or be used as seat-work.

1. Completion sentences are useful in helping to develop the ability to anticipate unfamiliar words.

The rabbit has a short

Apples grow on

2. In a similar exercise the child selects from a group the correct word to complete the sentence. The entire sentence should be read before the selection is made.

Bill laughed at the . . . snowman.

cat cold funny

Tom saw something go fast in the water.

He will catch the big

barn fish rabbit

3. To give practice in using a context clue to choose the appropriate word from two or three with *similar configuration*, the following sentences may be written:

The children . . . for the toys.

looked laughed

Father had . . . in his pocket.

money monkey

Dick . . . to the store.

went want

All of the boys . . . Bob went to the game.

except expect

4. Completion sentences in which there is more than one possible answer may be used. In the sentence below the child should be asked to tell what the missing word could be.

Mother called Joe to come to eat his

If he says *breakfast*, he should be asked to suggest other possibilities, such as *dinner* and *lunch*. He should then be given the same sentence with the first letter of the missing word being supplied, and be shown that if the letter is l . . , the missing word is probably *lunch*; if br . . . , *breakfast*; if d . . . , *dinner*. This type of exercise calls attention to visual clues that may be used to check meaning clues.

5. A page from an actual class text in geography or history may be utilized from which the children are asked to list words whose meanings are not entirely clear. With the list on the blackboard, the teacher may read the sentence aloud which con-

tains the unknown word in the textbook, encouraging the pupils to note any clues within the sentence, or passage, that might help to determine its meaning. Children should be permitted to form the habit of inferring the meanings of the words. However, reference to the dictionary should be made if the meaning can not be obtained from the context, or when the accuracy of the proposed meaning needs to be checked.

6. Teachers must also help pupils to understand that the only clue they have which helps them to identify the author's intended meaning of a word lies in the context in which the word is found. Oral exercises which provide children with practice in listening to shifts in meaning of familiar words may be used to contribute to the better understanding and skill required to cope with these same difficulties in reading. For example:

After the teacher has read a paragraph from a story aloud, she may write on the blackboard several other sentences in which a certain word, such as *ground*, is used with different meanings. She may explain (or ask the children to explain) what *ground* means each time it is used in the sentences and may list those meanings on the blackboard. Then the teacher might say, "Now I shall read this paragraph again. Listen carefully for the word *ground*. Think what it means each time it is used."

Following the rereading, class discussion should clarify the meaning of *ground* each time it appeared in the setting of this particular passage. Such practice should help pupils to avoid accepting the first meaning

which comes to their minds for a certain word.

Independent silent reading practice may be of a similar type. For example: "The word *ground* has several meanings. Check the sentence which shows how *ground* is used in this story."

- a. The wheat was *ground* into flour.
- b. Mother planted some flower seeds in the *ground*.
- c. The office is on the *ground* floor of the building.
- d. There is no *ground* for complaining about his work.

7. Definite guidance is needed to aid children to use context clues in selecting the appropriate meaning and pronunciation when they locate words in the dictionary. Class decision following discussion of the intended meaning is helpful, but may be varied by dramatizations and illustrations (oral and pictorial) which add interest and fun in the process of extending word meanings.

8. In the upper grades children enjoy playing "clue detective" and may be encouraged to bring new words in their context to class for discussion. The group may try to guess the meaning of the new word and tell what part of the sentence helped them to determine its meaning.

The children may suggest in their own words the kind of clue which helped them (definition, experience, etc.). Frequently pupils will begin using the various types of clues in their book reports or introduce them into their own stories and conversation. A child may say, "This is a story

of a man who lived alone so much that he was called a hermit."

Evaluation

How do we know whether children are learning to use context clues effectively? In addition to teacher observation of how the pupil attacks new words, McCullough⁵ suggests that the teacher make a test of seven parts, one for each clue. For each part of the test, selections should be taken from basal readers, textbooks, and library books in which there are clues for an unfamiliar word. Strengths and weaknesses of the class in using the various types of clues will be revealed from an analysis of the results. If the teacher discovers that her children need practice on certain kinds of contextual aids, she may then provide it, through many of the activities outlined above.

Special Problems

Occasionally the teacher encounters difficulty in her attempt to provide guidance in the use of context clues. One type of problem is the child who refuses to use context clues at all, while another kind of problem results when a pupil relies too much upon context clues.

Joe, a second-grader in a large city school, is a good example of the child who refuses to use printed context clues. In working individually with his teacher one day, Joe revealed his reasons for not using the context. "My dad tells me it is wrong to guess — either I know or I don't know. When I don't know the answer

I should say so, and not keep you and the kids waiting."

For Joe, guessing was immoral and he was shocked when his teacher asked him to "guess."

Knowing that Joe had recently learned to roller skate after innumerable trials and tumbles, Miss Jones asked him to tell her how he had learned to skate. Joe bubbled with his success, but pointed out that he had to try many times before he became a good skater. The teacher then casually mentioned that it was the same way in reading — that children couldn't learn to read without making mistakes or without guessing, sometimes. As she turned to the blackboard she said, "I am going to write a sentence which has one word missing. Read the sentence to yourself and try to think what the word could be that would make sense." She wrote, "Mother put the milk in the"

Joe hesitated, but responded that it could be "refrigerator," or an "ice box," or perhaps it was the special name of a refrigerator, like "Cold-spot" or "Kelvinator."

Next, Miss Jones placed the letter r at the beginning of the blank. Joe beamed and decided that the missing word had to be "refrigerator." His teacher completed the word on the blackboard, and Joe read the entire sentence.

This incident was only one of a series used to help Joe develop confidence in his ability to guess intelligently through the use of context clues in combination with other aids. His teacher was particularly careful also to communicate to all children

5. McCullough, "Recognition of Context Clues in Reading," *op. cit.*

the things which were right about their responses, even though the answer was incorrect. For example, if the correct word were "house" and the child had pronounced "horse," she gave credit to the child for having the word nearly right. She wrote the two words on the blackboard to show him how the words were alike and how they were different. She had observed that if she said, "No, that is wrong" without giving any recognition for the parts that were correct, that a child felt he might just as well have said "balloon" or "automobile."

The reading of the pupil who relies too much upon the context is characterized by numerous word omissions, additions, and substitutions. Frequently the "context reader" in his attempt to give the appearance of fluent reading will resort to the invention of a new story as he reads along and discovers too many unfamiliar words. When asked to read the sentence again correctly, the child will often give greater attention to details and overcome his first careless, inaccurate attempt. Easier materials and the systematic teaching of other word recognition methods are needed to alleviate his problem.

Summary

This article has outlined briefly a number of context clues which should be taught, the need for developing readiness for their intelligent use, the types of activities which may assist pupils in employing context clues more effectively, the need for evaluating pupils' abilities to determine the meaning and pronunciation of unfamiliar words through contextual

aids, and some special problems which arise in the teaching of this valuable method.

The use of the context serves as *one* important aid to both children and adults in identifying the pronunciation and meaning of an unknown word. When combined with the other word recognition techniques discussed in this issue, this is particularly helpful because it places continued emphasis upon reading for meaning.

Chicago Area Council

The Chicago Area Council of the I.C.I.R.I. held its first dinner meeting on March 5 at the Evanston Township High School. Three hundred members and guests attended.

Mrs. Dorothy Estabrook reported on a method which she employs to interest young children through the preparation of reading materials based on their personal experiences. Miss Phyllis Bland explained the materials and procedures which she uses in a workshop for students with special reading problems and in a developmental reading course for junior and senior high school students. A third report was given by Mrs. Elizabeth A. Simpson of the Illinois Institute of Technology outlining the process of diagnosis and instruction in the Reading Clinic which she directs for college students and adults.

The program was concluded with an address by Dr. Paul A. Witty, President of the I.C.I.R.I., who pointed out the significance of developmental reading programs and the important role of books as an aid to youth in their adjustment to life situations.

Some Poor Readers Have Emotional Problems

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A SIGNIFICANT number of retarded readers are emotionally disturbed according to reports from reading clinics and from classroom and remedial reading teachers. The prevalence of emotional disturbances among poor readers varies according to research reports. Gates¹ concluded that seventy-five percent were emotionally maladjusted, while others² report that all pupils with reading problems have emotional problems. The latter group contend that failure in reading is merely one of many symptoms of inadequate personal adjustment. In either case, the conclusion may be reached that emotional disturbances must be taken into account in any remedial reading program. Therefore, an understanding of the interaction between these two difficulties is of major concern to all teachers.

Early Patterns of Disturbances

The potential reading failure may enter school as an unhappy child who cannot free his energies for learning, or he may enter as a happy, well-adjusted child who fails to learn to read and becomes maladjusted because of

his failure. The complexity of the problems experienced and each child's manner of reacting to them precludes generalization. However, a few examples of specific problems may illustrate the interrelationship between reading failure and personal maladjustment.

Some children enter school so disturbed that their time is largely occupied with worry, day-dreaming and fear. Jimmie, a robust six-year old, constantly thought about his parents. His father had been in the army and when he returned, his mother discovered that the father "had changed." Frequent quarrels ensued, and the parents contemplated a divorce. Jimmie spent his school hours wondering what he could do to keep his parents together, or if they separated, what would become of him. Jimmie's teacher did not know about this problem because the parents were too proud to tell her, and Jimmie just sat and worried. For short periods when something exciting occurred in the classroom, he would participate, but in his value system his home was far more important than the usual school activities. Besides, he hated the stories about the happy children and the things they did with their parents. His high intellectual potentials could not be freed to inquire into the unknowns of the printed page.

1. Arthur I. Gates, "The Role of Personality Maladjustment in Reading Disability," *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, LIX, (September, 1941), pp. 77-83.

2. Emmy Sylvester and Mary S. Kunst, "Psychodynamic Aspects of the Reading Problem," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, XIII, (January, 1943), pp. 69-76.

On the other hand, Jill came to school with a devoted mother holding her hand. Both parents had always wanted their only child to surpass themselves and other children. Early encouragement had led Jill to express enjoyment in listening to stories. Hence at age four, her mother had taught her the A B C's and began to press her to learn to read. Lack of success resulted in Jill's loss of interest in hearing stories. In fact, she dreaded school because her mother had made it clear that one goes to school to learn to read. Most first-grade teachers can repeat this story from their own records of pupils who have been introduced to reading too early, pressed too much, frustrated, and consequently enter school with fears of failure. Such a pupil requires very careful guidance to relieve the emotional problems and to insure success in learning to read.

Unlike Jill, Mark had not been exposed to reading before school entrance. However, his five older sisters had made excellent records in the same school and had established a "family reputation" which was explained to Mark at frequent intervals by his first teacher. Furthermore, as the youngest child and the only boy in the family, he had failed to develop independence. Although he was bright, he was socially and emotionally immature. His teacher was surprised that Mark wanted help with every assigned task, regardless of how easy it was. She was even more surprised that he did not learn to read as his sister had learned so readily. The teacher misinterpreted Mark's immaturity and lack of training in

accepting responsibility. She invited his parents to come for a conference, explained to them that Mark was spoiled and lazy, and suggested that he must be helped at home or he would fail first grade.

Mark's conscientious mother, unguided by his teacher, began to teach him to read after school. This plan took away his play periods which he resented. His attention was constantly turned to how soon he could get out to play and as a result, he inquired about the time every few minutes. With his attention directed elsewhere and his mother's lack of experience in teaching reading, no progress was made. His mother became upset and punished him severely. When this plan was unsuccessful, the parents decided to pay him a penny for each word he learned. An immediate improvement occurred and Mark earned many pennies, but the words were forgotten as soon as the purpose of earning the pennies was served. By the end of the year Mark was still unable to read a primer and was required to repeat first grade. His parents were chagrined and told him that they were ashamed of him. He had disgraced this bright family and he was frequently reminded of his sisters' fine school records. It was not surprising that Mark was disturbed for he came to school accustomed to depending on someone else; he was suddenly expected to be independent; when he did not learn, he was punished; and finally he disgraced his whole family. He could only conclude that he was "dumb" and "no good." He feared failure so intensely that he was unable to try again.

In contrast, Carl had developed slowly prior to entering school and his parents, who were uneducated, were also unconcerned. He was sent to school only because the law required it, and he was expected to learn very little. Carl's teacher recognized the fact that he was not ready to begin formal reading so he was assigned to a pre-reading class for one semester. The second semester his teacher introduced reading, but Carl made no progress. He repeated first grade and then was promoted to second where his achievements were less than others and Carl could not understand the activities. As a result, his attention wandered and he occupied his time with unacceptable activities. Referral to the guidance counselor followed, and the study showed that Carl was a very slow learner who was about ready to learn to read at that time. Because he was a large boy for his age, he was sent on to third grade where his teacher used only Grade III readers. She was stern and insisted that Carl read with the others. Discipline problems increased, and he began to "skip" school. His parents were unconcerned, for they had expected little from the school experience. Here is an example which, to some degree, may be duplicated in many schools where reading instruction is not differentiated throughout the grades. In this case, Carl was not ready to read until the end of his third year in school when his teacher expected him to achieve with the class. Hence he became frustrated and, with inadequate guidance, became a disciplinary problem. Both the family and the school contrib-

uted to this problem in adjustment and reading.

These four brief descriptions of cases were chosen from many to illustrate some types of difficulties commonly encountered at the beginning stages of reading. In two instances the emotional disturbances were present before school entrance. In the other two the school program was not adjusted to the particular needs of these boys. In most instances, the home and school share the responsibility for helping the pupil who shows early patterns of emotional maladjustment or immaturity. If assistance is given early, many of the later and more serious difficulties may be avoided.

Patterns of Emotional Reactions Among Older Retarded Readers

Pupils who continue to fail to learn to read, whether or not they are required to repeat one or more grades, become increasingly disturbed emotionally. The manner in which each child reacts to his failure differs. For purposes of discussion, it is possible to classify the manifestations of emotional disturbances as aggressive, withdrawn, tense and worried. Some pupils show characteristics which do not fall in any one of these patterns, but may combine two or more of them.

Teachers readily recognize the aggressive pupil who fights back to regain his status in the group and his personal worth. Henry, age thirteen, exhibited aggressive behavior. He dipped the braids of the girl who sat in front of him into his ink bottle. He tripped a boy who walked down the aisle past him and placed thumbtacks

on another pupil's chair. He was involved in fights on the playground and was accused of breaking windows in his school. Although he denied the last charge, he commented to the writer, "I get blamed for everything anyway and I'm not a welcher." Henry's teachers said that he had a *mean* streak in him, and they thought that he was not very intelligent. His responses were always "flip" and argumentative, usually ending in muteness with a set jaw and an angry appearance.

After Henry came to the Reading Clinic and felt comfortable and respected by an accepting teacher, he explained that the pupils he assaulted were all good readers who had "made fun of him." He was so angry that he felt impelled to get even in any way available. Moreover, Henry thought that his teachers hated him. Only one teacher had won his confidence. To her he had once said that he felt sorry he had been unable to learn to read and sometimes it made him angry. Her reply was that he should get busy and learn so he would not have to be sorry. This response, unaccompanied by specific assistance to demonstrate that it was really possible for him to learn, served only to confirm his earlier opinion of teachers and led to further destructive outbursts.

Another example of aggressive responses was ten-year-old Bill who tore up the first book he saw and shouted, "Don't put these things in my way. A hundred teachers have tried to teach me to read and you're wasting your time." He had been so deeply hurt at home and later at school that even

the sight of a book demanded action on his part. Since he could do nothing intellectually with the book, he had to destroy it. Needless to say, an indirect approach to reading was indicated and it was necessary for him to make a book of his own and to develop a sight vocabulary to ensure success before he could turn his aggressive reactions toward coping successfully with a book.

Indirect aggression was shown by Sue who constantly wanted to talk but not to read. In school she was described as "bossy" because of her efforts to direct most activities. She frequently subdued other girls with her verbal attacks and even made them read lessons to her outside school. In this way she could be informed and ready to take an important part in class discussions. She had been taught to be a "lady" so she would not fight back with her hands, but she was fairly successful on a verbal level.

Most teachers are acutely aware of the aggressive child because he is always demanding attention. Only the astute teacher interprets correctly the symptoms of withdrawal. Such symptoms are often interpreted as the characteristics of a "lazy" child. Further inquiry usually reveals that the "lazy" pupil does not prepare his assignments, but neither does he create disturbances in school. He often verbalizes willingness to do as he is requested, but he does not carry through. If the teacher observes his behavior on the playground, she may discover that he is quite active, or that he is a bystander or observer.

Terry, age fifteen and in Grade

VIII, was described as lazy. He was scarcely able to read third-grade material, but he was given daily assignments in eighth-grade books. Although he was in the lower group in his class and assignments were shorter than for the others, he still failed to complete them. Terry's teacher did not recognize the fact that if his assignment had been only one paragraph, he would have been unable to complete it unaided. Furthermore, his spelling difficulty made it even harder to complete written assignments. He had learned that teachers could not read his papers so he just did not do them. Because Terry really wanted to comply, he looked at his books with his thoughts far away. One time he imagined that he was a great athlete and the whole school was admiring his prowess. Another time, he saw himself reading so well that he was a great radio announcer. In his daydreams he experienced success which he could never achieve in the world of reality. Thus he was able to avoid conflict with school authorities through withdrawal, but his assignments were never completed.

Outside the classroom Terry was very active. He played baseball and basketball reasonably well. In fact, careful observation of this boy revealed that he was "lazy" only when his classroom assignments were considered.

John was much like Terry in age, reading achievement, and classroom behavior. However, he was considerably overweight and was not physically active. On the playground he stood quietly watching others or wandered off by himself. After school he

worked with his tools in his father's basement workshop, but most of his time was spent watching television. John had experienced many rebuffs from his classmates because he could not read and had gradually withdrawn from social contacts. He described himself as a "lone wolf."

Children like Terry and John who withdraw from academic life but who conform to the extent that they cause no disturbance in school are often misunderstood. Terry maintained better social contacts outside the classroom where he received recognition for his athletics, while John was unable to obtain that type of satisfaction. In the schoolroom, both boys were considered lazy. As a result, pressure was applied by teachers and later by parents. This pressure only intensifies the pupils' dissatisfactions with themselves, and often increases unfavorable emotional responses.

In addition to aggressive and withdrawal reactions, there are instances where pupils exhibit unusual tension and undue anxiety. To them, taking tests becomes a major catastrophe. Before such tests, they try to study, they worry until they cannot sleep, and often become confused and perform at an inferior level. They express concern over their grades and are unable to accept failure or to do anything to insure success. When they attempt to read, they may scowl, stutter, and usually show early symptoms of fatigue. Others will rush through assignments, getting little from them except the satisfaction of turning the pages. Those who are particularly anxious may even read and reread, attempting to memorize

every selection regardless of the purpose of the assignment. In general, pupils who react with such tensions and anxieties have been urged at school and at home to read materials beyond the level of their achievement, or more rapidly than they can comprehend. Therefore, such pupils are seldom free from a feeling of frustration, which is expressed in many direct and subtle ways.

One illustration of this type of reaction is Mary Ann, a seventh-grade pupil whose reading scores on standardized tests varied from second to fourth grade. She was always trying to keep up with her class. She worked on her assignment after school every day until her parents sent her to bed at night. Frequently she cried before a quiz and even refused food. On several occasions, she became ill because her mother urged her to eat. Her usual complaint after a test was that she couldn't think of the answers. She was uncertain of those she thought she knew and erased to change them. One teacher observed that Mary Ann became rigid if called on to read aloud without preparation. Her voice was high-pitched and squeaky as a result of tension. Pupils who try to learn to read, and respond as Mary Ann does are usually unable to make progress. Unfortunately, these responses involving tension and concern are often confused with high motivation, and therefore misinterpreted by some teachers.

Symptoms of emotional disturbances among older retarded readers are many and varied. Examples have been given of pupils who were aggressive, withdrawn, tense, and anx-

ious. Whatever behavior the retarded reader may exhibit should be examined to determine how it is meeting his needs. Furthermore, an appraisal of possible modifications of his assignments and of ways to improve his reading may be useful in promoting satisfactory adjustment.

Therapy for Retarded Readers Who Are Emotionally Maladjusted

Pupils with reading difficulty are frequently emotionally maladjusted. Regardless of the origin of either problem, each problem inhibits remediation of the other. Some authorities advise psychotherapy,^{3,4} while others agree with Durrell that "the confidence which a child gains as he progresses through a well-planned remedial reading program has an alleviating effect on emotional difficulties . . ." McCarthy⁵ suggests that the personal relationship with the remedial teacher may be such that she becomes a psychotherapist, consciously or unconsciously. In many schools, neither a psychotherapist nor a remedial teacher is available so the classroom teacher may find it necessary to give remedial help to a large proportion of poor readers.

In instances where a psychotherapist is available, the teacher should give full cooperation to this person,

3. "Clinical Studies in Reading I," *Supplementary Educational Monographs*, 68, (June, 1949), Chapter VII.

4. Donald D. Durrell, "Tests and Corrective Procedure for Reading Disabilities," *Elementary English*, XII, (April, 1935), pp. 91-95.

5. Dorothea McCarthy, "Personality and Learning," in *Education for the Preservation of a Democracy*, Report of the 13th Conference, 1948, *Studies Series I*, No. 35, Volume 13, pp. 93-96.

recognizing that such assistance is designed to free the pupils' energies so that they can be applied to learning. Frequently, the specialist may have useful suggestions for alleviating the emotional difficulty as well as for promoting successful teaching. In some instances where it is suggested that reading instruction be postponed, the teacher should ask for subsequent reports as to the time such instruction may profitably be initiated. A few teachers make the error of immediately refusing suggestions because to them, they seem impractical in a group situation. Usually such differences of opinion can be arbitrated to the advantage of the pupil.

When psychotherapy is initiated, immediate and sudden improvements are not to be expected. In most successful cases, the change in behavior occurs slowly and irregularly. Teachers' observations of learning and adjustment are highly valued by the therapist during these periods.

Experience reveals that a large proportion of retarded readers who are somewhat disturbed emotionally may be taught by an understanding and patient teacher who meets their needs. Coincident with reading improvement, tensions decrease, and behavior becomes more acceptable and stable. Most important of all, the pupil is happier. Success in reading instruction with these pupils depends upon interpersonal relationships and good teaching. Space permits discussion of only a few of the most pertinent principles.

First, it is important that the teacher provide a warm, accepting atmosphere. The pupil must feel that the

teacher really likes him. Hence it is necessary for her to show her feelings rather than just to verbalize them. This principle is more easily stated than carried out, especially with a large enrollment in the classroom. However, experience shows that the poor reader who considers his teacher to be his friend makes the greatest progress.

Second, opportunities should be provided in which the poor reader can talk with his teacher. Such a relationship cannot be established unless the teacher respects him as an individual. She must also listen and understand rather than criticize and offer advice. When a poor reader can tell his teacher that he hates reading and she can understand, one important step has been taken toward progress.

Third, it is essential to determine each pupil's interests and to use them as a basis for motivating reading. Charles, age 14, reading at the first-grade level, was interested in hot rods. His first efforts to learn to read came when his teacher permitted him to dictate his own stories, illustrate them with pictures cut from magazines, and make his own book for reading. Only the teacher who has excellent rapport with her pupil can determine his real interests. Otherwise the pupil who feels that he must conform to the teacher's pattern will give the answers he thinks she expects.

Fourth, instructional periods may profitably be short if the pupil's attention span is limited. Several periods per day of five minutes in length may be much more effective than one period of thirty minutes. With added

confidence, security, and interest, the instructional periods may be lengthened.

Fifth, each pupil must begin at the level and stage of reading growth at which he can be successful. He should also be challenged each day or he will not make progress. It is essential that assignments in all areas be within his level of achievement. Adjusting to his needs during the reading period, and then expecting him to read social studies or science materials at a much higher level, is inconsistent and frustrating.

Sixth, each retarded reader needs concrete evidence of his gains and honest praise when it is earned. He is usually aware of his limitations which need not be pointed out to him and certainly need not be revealed to his classmates. For that reason, it is helpful if he compares his own present achievement with his own past achievement rather than with that of others in his group.

Seventh, when an occasion arises requiring oral reading for an audience, ample instruction and practice in advance enables the poor reader to perform well and adds to his self-respect. Careful preparation eliminates the embarrassment suffered when other pupils correct him or laugh at his performance.

Eighth, it is helpful in easing tension if the purpose for each reading assignment is clearly defined. Specific guidance in the economical means for accomplishing the stated purpose is especially useful to older retarded readers.

Ninth, recognition of oral contributions and of satisfactory performance

in tasks which do not involve reading is particularly desirable. However, it should not be overdone to the end that complete satisfaction is gained and motivation for reading achievement is reduced.

Finally, the satisfactory adjustment of any retarded reader is the product of cooperation between the school and the home. To this end, the parents need to be informed of the plans and procedures employed by the school. They need reassurance that their child is not intellectually dull, and that many other children with similar learning difficulties have been rehabilitated.

The ten foregoing suggestions represent some of the aspects each teacher may wish to consider in dealing with disturbed pupils. Only through continuous experimentation and adaptation to individual differences may each individual's problems be met.

Prevention Versus Correction

All conscientious teachers strive to prevent reading disability and emotional maladjustments among their pupils. In the early grades, it is especially important to give individual attention to pupils in the classroom. An appraisal of readiness for reading and of personal adjustment is best accomplished on this basis. A part of this appraisal can be made by the use of tests, but the insights of good teachers are equally important. At present and in the near future, there is grave danger of permitting enrollments to become so large that teachers cannot be effective in preventing such problems.

It is also essential to recognize the

fact that a large proportion of retarded readers are boys. Research has shown that boys generally make slower progress in reading than girls during the first four grades. As Hughes⁶ points out, the causes of these differences are not known, but if rate of growth and development are responsible, it would be realistic to readjust the goals for boys during these early years. If the causes lie in the methods of teaching, the materials, or the motivation of boys, then here is a definite challenge to teachers. Further research is needed to explain this sex difference in learning to read.

If instruction is adjusted to the personal and educational needs of each pupil, with special help when difficulties arise, both reading and emotional problems will be alleviated, and the spiral of interaction between the two may be prevented. Until this ideal is achieved, most teachers find it necessary to meet the needs of retarded readers. In most instances, varying degrees of emotional disturbance accompany failure. Therapy for either problem may alleviate the other. However, the teacher is seldom qualified as a psychotherapist, but she is prepared to teach reading. For successful teaching, one must apply many of the principles known to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. By providing for optimum learning, the teacher also facilitates personal and emotional adjustments of many of her pupils.

6. Mildred C. Hughes, "Sex Differences in Reading Achievement in the Elementary Grades," in *Clinical Studies in Reading II, Supplementary Educational Monographs*, No. 77, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (January, 1953), pp. 102-106.

Pamphlets to Watch For

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What Does Research Tell Us About Readiness for Beginning Reading?

by Gertrude H. Williams
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CONSIDERABLE experimentation in reading readiness has been carried on by educators and reading specialists in many ways for a number of years. The studies most frequently reported have included the major factors concerned with readiness for reading. This information has been supplemented by other investigations of special disabilities which may handicap a child in learning to read. An examination of the results of related research has revealed marked relationships between deficiencies in certain readiness factors and a substantial amount of reading retardation. Many significant implications for the effective teaching of reading on all instructional levels may be drawn from both types of investigations.

The Nature of Reading Readiness

A careful survey of the literature justifies the conclusion that readiness is of more than one type. At least three specific concepts of reading readiness are being emphasized in modern reading improvement programs: first, pupil preparation for initial reading instruction; second, pupil motivation in respect to a given reading activity; and third, pupil acquisition of all those forms of skills, abilities, and interests necessary for successful reading on a higher stage of learning. All

three concepts may be identified with reading at every level of instruction. However, in the present report, only the first concept of readiness will be developed.

There is general agreement among educators and psychologists that readiness for reading is a developmental condition which is dependent upon a group of closely related factors. (3), (13), (15). Numerous studies have been made in an effort to determine the extent to which those factors which are closely associated with reading readiness are responsible for failure or success in beginning reading. Some of the more significant research has been summarized in this report.

Physical Readiness

Vision. Many studies have been devoted to determining the influence of visual acuity in respect to reading efficiency. Dean (6) studied 116 first-grade children for visual anomalies and found 22 percent with defects. However, the correlation was too low to indicate a significant relationship. Fendrick (10) attempted to get at the problem by measuring the visual acuity of good and poor readers in the second and third grades. He found statistically significant evidence favoring good readers that indicated better than normal visual acuity for distant

vision in the right rather than left eye.

Hearing. For a number of years auditory efficiency has been considered a contributing factor to reading readiness. A comparative study of the auditory acuity of good and poor readers was made by Bond (4). He reported the existence of significant differences in the hearing abilities of the two groups. Kennedy (18) investigated auditory acuity and reading achieved in silent and oral reading. Her subjects were children in the first three grades. Kennedy found that 50 percent of all her subjects who placed in the lowest quartile in silent reading had a high frequency loss in hearing. Betts (3) and others have mentioned hearing losses as a possible cause of reading disability.

Speech Defects. Bennett (2) investigated the causes of reading retardation on the elementary school level. Results showed that the history of a child's having had defective speech was highly significant, even though no defect was in evidence at the time of the diagnosis. Eustis (9) studied the relationships between specific language deficiencies and family background. Authentic data from the "family tree" records of physicians presented evidence in support of a pattern of language disabilities within a given family unit. Artley (1) reviewed the literature regarding the relationship between reading retardation and speech deficiencies. His evidence pointed to speech defects as both the cause and the result of reading disability.

Other Factors. Carroll (5) investigated the significance of sex differences at the beginning reading readi-

ness stage. As a result of testing over 1,000 pupils she found critical differences favoring the girls. A comparison of 486 achieving readers and 875 retarded readers was made by Eames (8) in an effort to identify certain diseases and defects that might be associated with reading disability. Diseases of the mouth, ears and nose were twice as frequent among retarded readers, while certain other physical deficiencies such as malnutrition, skin diseases, and common infectious diseases, appeared only among the retarded readers.

Intellectual Readiness

As the result of a number of investigations, the mental age of an individual has been emphasized as a crucial factor in efficient beginning reading. Deputy (7) was one of the first investigators of the relationship between reading achievement and mental age. Using first graders as subjects, he administered association tests, a word-selection test, a test of content comprehension and recall, and a mental test. He concluded that the best single instrument for predicting reading success was the mental test. In 1931 Morphett and Washburne (24) investigated the relation of mental maturity to beginning reading success. They found that children with mental ages of six years, six months, were most likely to succeed with symbol learning. Dean (6) obtained a multiple correlation of .64 between reading achievement and a combined mental age and reading readiness score, and a correlation of .62 between reading achievement and mental age alone. A correlation of .77 was obtained by

Kottmeyer (19) when he used the Detroit Beginning First-Grade Intelligence Test and the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test to predict reading achievement. Monroe (22) produced evidence that her battery of reading aptitude tests could reliably predict success or failure in first-grade reading. Gates (11) used a reading readiness test and the Pintner-Cunningham Primary Mental Test to study the relationship between reading achievement and mental status. He concluded that the best estimates in predicting reading success can be made by using both a mental test and a reading readiness test.

Personal Readiness

Social adjustment and emotional security are personal factors that greatly influence reading success, especially at the readiness stage. Russell (28) reported the results of a survey to determine the relationship between personality and reading failure. He concluded: (1) reading disability is not characterized by any one personality pattern among pupils of normal and superior intelligence; (2) there is no one personality trait in which achieving readers are always superior to retarded readers; (3) personality aberrations may be in evidence as either the cause or the result of extreme reading disability.

In order to determine the social readiness of first graders, Milner (21) secured data from personal interviews with 42 pupils and their parents. An analysis of the records showed that the best readers had the highest social maturity scores. Orear (26) investigated the influence of social maturity on

reading success. It was concluded that although social maturity may be considered a major factor in reading readiness, it does not guarantee success in the first-grade reading situation.

Language Readiness

Learning to read is a difficult and frequently an unpleasant experience for the child who lacks adequate language readiness. Reports of investigations of the oral language powers of young children were made by Madeline Horn (17), Madora Smith (30), and others. In these studies it was estimated that the average child's vocabulary, at the beginning first-grade level, is approximately 2,500 words. A controversial report on the oral language facility of entering first graders was made by Seashore (29) in 1948. He claimed that the average child's vocabulary, when he enters the first grade, is 17,000 basic words plus 7,000 derivatives. In addition, he stated that a maximum vocabulary of 40,000 words might be claimed for the brightest children.

Hildreth (16) reviewed several scientific studies concerned with the interrelationships between reading and the other language areas. She concluded that (1) a close relationship exists between reading comprehension and hearing comprehension; (2) language is a central factor in silent reading; and (3), a possible relationship exists between poor language comprehension and reading difficulties.

Perceptual Readiness

Investigations have shown that the

development of readiness for visual perception is a part of the child's total perceptual development as well as a process in itself. Perceptual readiness for reading means the development of both visual and auditory perception for printed symbols. Gates and Boeker (12) studied the relation of reading success to visual perception. They found that young children experience much difficulty with the perceptual skills required for efficient reading.

Meek (20) investigated the perceptual habits of mentally average and superior children. She asserted that both the average and the superior children have inadequate perceptual habits which affect later progress in reading. Reading readiness tests and later reading ability were used by Gates, Bond and Russell (14) in their investigation of the relation of visual perception to reading proficiency. The results indicated a positive relationship between visual perception and success in beginning reading. More recently Potter (27) studied the occurrence of errors in visual perception among 176 beginning readers. She concluded: that "if children are to improve in their ability to discriminate between confusingly similar words they require some guidance in observation which will cause them to note details in the sequence pattern."

Experimental evidence in regard to auditory discrimination at the beginning reading level was reported by Murphy (25). Murphy found that confusions in reading were caused, to some extent, by the inability of young children to distinguish likenesses and

differences in the sounds of words. She concluded that higher reading attainment would result from systematic guidance in auditory discrimination. The investigations of Wilson (32) and others with kindergarten and first-grade children showed a positive relationship between adequate auditory perception and reading success.

Implications for Teaching

1. Readiness for learning is fundamental to all instruction.

2. The physical status of the individual is an important factor in all learning activities. However, it should be remembered that some controversial evidence has resulted from the studies in relation to reading readiness.

3. Beginning reading success cannot be guaranteed by a given mental age. Intelligence is a significant index of reading readiness when intelligence tests are used with other tests in the diagnostic situation.

4. Effective guidance in reading requires both a knowledge of reading and an understanding of the personal life and adjustment of each pupil.

5. The results of investigations support the assumption that there is a significant relationship between oral language facility and success in beginning reading.

6. Perceptual readiness for reading may be influenced by the effect of previous experience, language, attitudes, and purpose.

Needed Research

There are still many aspects of reading readiness which could stimulate further research. There is also

evidence that a number of the investigations of readiness that have been made should be compared with similar studies that might corroborate or disprove the present findings. The problems that follow are suggestive of the types of reading readiness research that merit the serious consideration of educators and reading specialists.

1. Has the research relating to reading readiness factors been intensive and extensive enough to provide a satisfactory basis for developing the fundamental reading skills?

2. Of what importance are reading readiness experiences in terms of type and sequence?

3. Is there a need for more adequate tests to measure the child's facility for oral language?

4. Are there more effective ways of building concepts for initial reading programs?

5. Are there more satisfactory methods of determining the relationship of auditory perception to beginning reading success?

In Conclusion

The effectiveness of the readiness program in reading has been well established through a number of investigations. On the basis of all the evidence available, a significant amount of progress has been made in the better understanding of the factors and conditions that influence reading readiness. The continuous evaluation of the varied factors involved should provide for improved approaches to effective reading instruction.

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Let's Organize Parent-Teacher Study Groups

by William D. Sheldon
Director, Reading Laboratory
Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York

NEWSPAPERS, popular magazines, scientific journals, and books are reporting the need for parent-teacher study groups organized to aid in the understanding and improvement of reading instruction.

The September issue of the *Elementary School Journal* was devoted to the topic, "What should be the profession's attitude toward lay criticism of the schools?" In this issue special emphasis was given to reading.

We are familiar with many communities where confused and disgruntled laymen have attacked the school program with damaging effect. Much of the attack has been in reference to the so-called Three R's, and reading instruction has been singled out frequently for criticism.

We are all aware of the advantages of prevention rather than the necessity of cure. It is reasonable to suppose that carefully developed parent-teacher study of the reading program could prevent many of these attacks. At the same time, the present reading program might be improved.

I would like to propose a nine-step plan for parent-teacher study groups for the improvement of reading instruction. This plan may take three to five years and involve all of the staff of the schools in a community and almost all of the interested parents.

Teachers must take the first steps in this program by getting together and coming to some conclusions as to what they are doing. They must identify the strengths and weaknesses of their present reading program. They might ask themselves questions such as those suggested by Gray in the Elementary School Journal:

How well do our pupils read?

Do we have a well-balanced, sequential reading program throughout the elementary and the high school?

Is reading narrowly or broadly conceived?

Do we recognize and provide effectively for individual differences?

Are we giving well balanced emphasis to all the important aspects of reading?

In many schools, community attacks have been aggravated by the unfortunate comments of high school teachers, who have not made a careful study of what is taking place in the elementary school. In one community the attitude of the high school teachers became so hostile that the elementary teachers requested that something be done so that high school teachers could become better informed. This resulted in study groups composed of high school and elementary teachers.

During the discussions which followed many interesting facts were

brought out. Many of the high school teachers had not been in an elementary classroom since their own school days. Some had children who were not learning to read successfully. Others were bewildered by the "hordes," and I quote, "of illiterate youngsters flooding into our (10-12 grade) classes."

It didn't take long for many of the confusions to become clarified. Hostility and ignorance became compassion and understanding. In this particular school it has now become standard procedure for high school teachers to visit the elementary schools and elementary school teachers to visit in the high school.

After teachers and administrators have developed some understanding of their own program, they might be ready for Step 2.

The second step is to communicate with parents regarding the reading program.

If a P.T.A., mother's council, or some other parent group is already operating in a school, the problem of communication is simplified. Perhaps a committee of teachers can meet with a parent committee and discuss the possibility of organizing parent-teacher study groups for the purpose of improvement of reading instruction.

This parent committee can be helpful in developing or directing the interests of parent groups. The interest will be at different levels in the varying communities, but most parents want to understand reading instruction.

In fact one sure way to draw parents to a meeting is to have a pro-

gram about the teaching of reading.

If a parent group has not been organized in a school, an advisory council should be formed. This council might consist of interested parents of children of all ages. The invitation might come from the teachers and might well begin as a social function followed by general discussion. Such discussion can lead to the more specific topic of the possibility and need for forming parent-teacher groups for the improvement of reading instruction.

The initial contact with parents requires a great deal of delicacy. Certainly care is needed in the selection of parent members. Some groups, chosen at random, and having their suspicions aroused by careless or clumsy handling, have become a major force in attacking an inept teaching staff.

The first meeting with a large group of parents is a logical third step. Before such a meeting is called, it should be planned carefully. One plan might be to have a panel discussion on reading instruction in the school.

This panel might take as its topic, "Do we need to improve reading instruction in our schools?" or "How can we improve reading instruction in our schools?"

At some point the large group should break into smaller groups to study specific areas. Some of these areas might well be:

Readiness for reading.

How are word analysis skills developed?

Why don't we teach reading in the kindergarten?

What are the "groups"?

Why do we promote youngsters before they read on their present grade level?

How can parents help children with reading?

Why do they fail to learn to read?

How can we best report children's progress in reading?

How does our modern reading program compare with that of yesterday's?

What is done about reading instruction in the junior and senior high schools?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the experience and the basal reading methods?

These small groups might then meet for a series of study sessions. The chairman should not always be a teacher. In fact, it might be wise to have at least half the groups led by parents.

Such study groups should have the use of all school resources, including demonstrations by certain teachers, textbook materials, consultants, and the advice and help of other teachers.

Reports of the small study groups should be made to the large group.

After each group has studied its problems, a meeting should be called for all groups. At this time each group should report its findings. Perhaps these reports could be mimeographed and bound in a booklet which might be entitled, "What We Found Out About Reading Instruction."

As each group gives its report, general discussion might follow. From this might come the answer to the pertinent question: How well are we

doing in our school?

Evaluation of the reading program is the next step. Individual groups might now proceed to form small committees to develop an instrument or select a process for the evaluation of the school program.

The items to be evaluated can be discussed in the large group meeting and after this, classified by the small committee. The criteria set up by Herrick or Whipple or the questions raised by Gray might serve as the keystones for such an evaluation.

When the committee has finished, it should write up its report and bring it back to a general meeting.

A discussion of the evaluation of the school's reading program should follow.

This could be a most exciting meeting. An able moderator might first have teacher and parent members report on their findings. Then an open discussion could follow with parents raising questions from the floor. These questions might well lead to the need for continuing the study now aimed at correcting the flaws found in the program.

The formation of a reading advisory committee might well follow this general meeting.

This committee would serve in an advisory fashion to both the parent group and the staff of the school. It would provide a continuous appraisal of the on-going reading program and make frequent status reports to parents and teachers.

From this committee would come suggestions for revisions in the program and in reading materials. Teacher and parent study groups

might also be developed. Through this committee would flow criticisms and suggestion. Thus all who complained or had problems would be answered or helped.

The next step would be a variety of large projects sponsored by the advisory committee for the education of the whole community.

A well organized program should be developed each year by the advisory committee. This program should have as its main purpose the task of informing and educating the public concerning the status of the reading program.

Some of the program might include:

A demonstration or series of demonstrations of techniques or methods being used.

A series of movies on reading or some phase of it, with discussion.

Visiting days focused around reading instruction. Book fairs directed

towards parents as well as teachers and children.

A continuous parent clinic manned by members of the advisory committee. This clinic would be held frequently and provide information, explanation, and demonstration for individuals and small groups.

These nine steps are but suggestions recommended out of my experiences with teachers and parents. I urge that school men prepare to meet the public on a sound basis concerning the reading program. It is regrettable that parents and teachers usually get together after many have been hurt and the school program damaged.

I believe that parents and teachers working together through study groups could develop a new era of understanding and good will and through this improve rather than damage our on-going reading program.

Membership Campaign for the Reading Council

THIS SUMMER a campaign for new members of the International Council for Reading Instruction will be launched by the Board of Governors under the leadership of the incoming president, Dr. Paul Witty of Northwestern University.

Encouraged by the steady growth of the organization the Board of Governors has authorized the expansion of headquarters services under Dr. Donald L. Cleland, Executive Secretary-Treasurer with offices at the University of Pittsburgh, and the enlargement of *The Reading Teacher*.

Plans for the 1953-54 issues of the magazine are outlined briefly on page 52 of this issue.

If you have found *The Reading Teacher* helpful, you are urged to give it your support by bringing in new members to the organization.

A membership blank is included with each issue of the magazine. (See page 50 of this issue). Folders describing the work of the Reading Council and the content of *The Reading Teacher* may be secured free of charge from Dr. Cleland for distribution to prospective members of the organization.

Adults, Too, Can Improve Their Reading Skills

*by Donald L. Cleland
Reading Laboratory
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

HAVE YOU ever stopped to count the number of times that you as an adult have used the art of reading during a day? Have you considered to what extent efficient reading habits contribute to the successful completion of your daily tasks? A moment's thought will convince you of the tremendous importance of efficient reading habits in the daily performance of your duties. It is very difficult to imagine any task that does not require the interpretation of printed symbols.

Reading is an art or a skill that must be studied and practiced with enthusiasm and intelligence if the reader is to approach his potentialities. If he is to achieve a high level of reading performance, he must practice this skill with an intense desire to improve it. Once he has acquired a certain skill in reading, he must practice to maintain it.

To improve his own skill he must be imbued with the philosophy of self-competition. The reader must practice the art of reading so that he will be a better reader tomorrow than he is today.

There are several reading skills. The reading situation determines the particular skill that shall be used. In reading a novel, one type of reading skill is used; in reading a zoology assignment, an entirely different reading skill may be employed. Still another

skill may be used if the reader is hunting up certain information in the almanac or atlas. Not only must the reader use a skill efficiently, but he must know what skill to use in a particular situation.

For adults the big question is, "Can we improve our reading skills?" Without any doubt the answer is yes. During the past several years I have been conducting classes at Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, the Koppers Company, and Armco Steel Company. The purpose has been to improve the reading habits of their supervisory personnel. The results have been very gratifying. All agree that the newly acquired skill in reading has enabled them to perform their duties more efficiently. Tests administered six months after the conclusion of the course have indicated that the gains in rate and comprehension have a degree of permanency. Many of these students have stated that they read more and get more pleasure from their reading.

Causes of Poor Reading Habits

Since it is possible, then, for adults to improve their reading abilities, why is it that they often read at very low levels of competency? Let us next consider some of the factors which cause inefficient reading habits among adults.

Meager Experiential Background. Recently, James C. Craig, a member of the Faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a little exercise in one of his classes to prove the value of a rich background of experience in giving meaning to reading. A mimeographed list of about twenty-five words, the digits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0, and other symbols such as parentheses, brackets, exponents, etc., was given to each member of the class. All agreed they knew the definitions of the words or could properly interpret the other symbols. Then a second sheet was given to each class member. This sheet contained a problem in calculus, using only the words and symbols listed on the first page. Only those who had taken a course in calculus could interpret the problem. Why? Simply because they lacked the experiential background to give meaning to the problem.

The inference here is that reading is more than getting meaning from the printed page; what you take to the page gives it depth or vividness of meaning. A young man who has been to Africa may get much more out of a book dealing with the life and customs of the natives than a man who has spent his entire life within the continental limits of the United States. One who has seen a game of ice hockey may get more meaning out of an article describing the techniques of scoring than a person who has never seen or played the game.

It is possible, therefore, to enrich one's experiences vicariously, as well as through direct experiences. This can be accomplished by reading simple easy material in a given area,

which will provide a background for more complex materials later.

Inadequate Vocabulary. Improvement in recognizing words and building up a sight vocabulary usually results from cue deductions. The student learns to depend more upon the context than upon the precise inspection of each word. The context in which the word is placed and certain visual characteristics of the word give a cue to its meaning. Thus the individual who requires more than the normal amount of cues, reads more slowly than the one who requires fewer cues to recognition.

There are three aspects to the process of acquiring the meanings of words. *First*, there is simple recognition. This may mean that only one meaning needs to be associated with the word. *Second*, there is extensiveness of meaning. To get a more generalized concept of a word, a person must associate with the word more than one meaning. To many people the word *cat* may refer to a lion, lynx, cheetah, tiger, a whip made of rope or leather, or, to the sailor, it may mean a device for hoisting and carrying a ship's anchor. *Third*, there is depth or vividness of meaning. This is closely tied up with a person's experiential background. The word "cat" will have a different meaning to a person who has had some hair-raising experiences in hunting or trapping a tiger. These three phases of meaning are not necessarily distinct; there will be overlapping. If any of the three phases are lacking, the reader will be less efficient in reading than if all three are operating together to produce efficient meaning. The

cause of poor reading among many adults is failure to derive meaning adequately.

Lack of a Differentiated Attack. Many writers have noted that the slow, laborious reader usually reads all materials at the same rate, irrespective of the purpose or difficulty of the material. The efficient reader will pace his rate of reading according to the purpose of his reading and the difficulty of the material.

At one of our mid-western universities, an experiment was conducted to prove this theory. A group of one hundred graduate students was given four selections to read, namely: (1) a passage from *Lorna Doone*; (2) a selection from *As You Like It*; (3) excerpt from a college zoology text and; (4) a selection from *The World Almanac*. The rate of reading these passages for the class as a whole was computed. The selection from *Lorna Doone* was read the most rapidly; next the selection from *As You Like It*; the selection from the college zoology text ranked third; and the selection from *The World Almanac* ranked last. Tests of comprehension gave evidence that the students used a differentiated attack. They read the historical novel to get the *general significance* and the selection from Shakespeare for *inference*. They were *mentally organizing* the material from the zoology text; and due to the factual type of material in the almanac, they were *reading for detail*.

Inadequate Powers of Visual Perception. The important part played by the eyes during the reading process cannot be overemphasized. A person should be able to read for

three or four hours continuously without experiencing visual discomfort. In fact, if a person finds that he cannot read for any extended time without eye discomfort, he should consult a reliable optometrist or any ophthalmologist without delay.

To test the hypothesis that visual fatigue may cause failure to achieve success in reading, an extensive experiment was conducted under the direction of Carmichael and Dearborn¹ to determine if they could find any evidence of visual fatigue during a six-hour reading period. Groups of college students were used in this experiment. The students were carefully selected and were screened for any visual anomalies. A continuous record was kept of the movement of the eyes during the six-hour reading period. Interspersed through the reading were comprehension tests to determine the efficiency of the reading. Each group read two types of material; one selection was taken from *Lorna Doone*, a historical novel, and from Adam Smith's, *The Wealth of Nations*. There was no evidence to indicate any visual fatigue and the tests of comprehension indicated that students read as efficiently at the end of the six-hour period as they did at the beginning. The inference is that a person can read for six hours without experiencing any eye discomforts and without lowering his comprehension efficiency. Since the students selected were average or above average readers, it is reasonable to say that they used a differentiated attack;

1. Carmichael and Dearborn, "Reading and Visual Fatigue," Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1947.

that is, they paced their reading according to the difficulty and the purpose for which they were reading. If these students had had serious visual defects, however, it is probable that their reading would have been affected by visual fatigue.

Other factors might be mentioned which contribute to inefficient reading habits among adults, but the ones developed here are the most likely to cause inefficient reading.

Advice to the Adult Reader

Strive at all times to develop your vocabulary. One of the best ways to develop your vocabulary is through wide and extensive reading. It is an established fact that the body grows and develops in proportion to the quality and quantity of the food it receives. Similarly the mind grows in proportion to the quality and quantity of the food it receives. If a person reads only the Whodunnit type of books, he will be feeding his mind a starvation diet. Such a diet will contribute little to the development of an adequate vocabulary for any other kind of reading.

Make adequate use of contextual clues in adding words to your vocabulary. Suppose you meet the word *catatonic* in the sentence: "Twice he went into a *catatonic* trance and successfully feigned death." The context suggests a deep coma. Verify your skill by looking up the meaning in a good dictionary, noting the root word, the prefix, and their derivations.

Make use of your knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and the roots from which certain English words are de-

rived. Smith,² and Brown³ have listed root words from which many of our English words are derived. Stauffer⁴ made a study of the common prefixes found in the 20,000 words of Thorndike's *Teacher's Word Book*. A study of these lists will give a reader a clue as to which prefixes will aid him the most in vocabulary building exercises.

If all clues fail in giving the meaning of words, then the reader must turn to a *good* dictionary. People with large vocabularies always have a good dictionary handy. They will use it frequently and efficiently. Learning a word is an associative process. The meaning or meanings are associated with the symbol, the printed word. Before the word becomes a permanent part of a person's vocabulary, it may be necessary to make many associations. Noting the different meanings of the word, its derivation, its syllabication and its spelling will help to strengthen the association. *Epidemic* comes from two Greek words; *epi* means among; *demos* means people. Hence the word means something prevalent among people, such as a disease. From the foregoing example, it is comparatively easy to get the meaning of *epizootic*. *Epi* means among, and *zoo* suggests animal.

2. Smith, S. Stephenson, "The Command of Words," The Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1935, p. 67.

3. Brown, James I., "Minnesota Efficient Reading Series," Keystone View Company, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

4. Stauffer, Russell G., "A Study of Prefixes in the Thorndike List to Establish a List of Prefixes that Should be Taught in the Elementary School," *Journal of Educational Research*, Volume 35, February 1942, pp. 453-458.

Practice some rapid reading each day. Because words denote little in isolation, it is most difficult to get the intended meaning in word-by-word reading. Take the word *bow*, for example. It may mean the part of a ship or boat, the bow in bow and arrow, a curtsy, the bend in a board or rod, or to humiliate. In the following phrase the meaning has been limited or qualified to an extent: "The brightly colored bow," but if we add one more word, "The brightly colored bow *tie*," the word takes on a definite meaning. The rapid reading of easy materials each day will aid you to read in thought groups. After you have read the passage, it is helpful to recapitulate what you have read.

Pace your rate according to difficulty and purpose. Not all materials are to be read at the same rate. You may wish to read a novel very rapidly because you are reading to get the general significance rather than the details. If you are reading an editorial, your rate will naturally be much slower. In this case you are doing critical reading. In your criticism or evaluation you will be taking into consideration the author's education and background, his purpose in writing the article or the philosophy of the editorial board. Or you may read more slowly if you are reading the directions of a complex chemical experiment. In this case you are reading for detail. The skillful reader will unconsciously adjust his rate according to the purpose and difficulty of the material.

Read a variety of types of materials. The efficient reader is usually an avid reader; he reads all types of

materials. Do not feed your mind a starvation diet, but a well balanced one. Read easy materials, difficult materials; read about science, about philosophy and religion, about abstract things; read fiction, historical novels; and even some *Whodunnits*. (The latter, I believe, should have a small place in a good reading diet). Read biographies and autobiographies of some of our great leaders in history. You may be surprised to learn how they were practically self-educated through wide and extensive reading. They literally lifted themselves by their bootstraps. The practice of reading widely adds fluency to one's reading and develops the ability to adjust to different kinds of material.

Develop habits of self-competition. Anyone who has acquired the skill of a virtuoso in any art has done it through practice with an intense desire to improve the skill already gained. Always strive to improve your vocabulary, your rate of reading, your comprehension skills and various other skills that you will use in reading different types of materials. You will find satisfaction in the realization of the fact that you have refined your techniques and skills in reading.

Do not make a fetish of speed. At the expense of repetition, I wish to emphasize that some materials are not to be read rapidly. No one would wish to read Lincoln's Gettysburg Address at a high rate of speed. This masterpiece should be read slowly. Linger awhile on certain thoughts, so that you may draw from your background of experiences to give the passages depth and vividness of mean-

ing. Can you imagine anyone reading passages from the Bible at breakneck speed, especially selections from the Book of Ruth, or from the Book of Psalms? Or could anyone get the beauty of certain passages taken from Rachel Carson's book, *The Sea Around Us*, by what we might call *headline reading*? I think not.

If adults who wish to improve their own reading skills will strive at all times to develop their vocabulary by wide and extensive reading, by learning certain root words and the meanings of a few of the common prefixes

and suffixes, by the intelligent use of the dictionary, by the use of contextual clues wherever possible; if they will practice rapid reading of easy material every day; if they will pace their reading rate according to the difficulty and the purpose of the reading; if they will read widely a variety of different subjects; if they will become imbued with the philosophy of self-competition — I feel sure that they will experience great satisfaction in the refinement and improvement of their present reading skills.

DR. DONALD L. CLELAND
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY-TREASURER, I.C.I.R.I.
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
PITTSBURGH 13, PENNSYLVANIA

- ☐ I hereby apply for membership in the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and enclose \$2.00 as my annual membership dues for the year, \$1.50 of which is for subscription to THE READING TEACHER.
- ☐ I hereby apply for life membership in The International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and enclose \$50.00 as my life membership dues, \$37.50 of which is for a life's subscription to THE READING TEACHER.
- ☐ I enclose \$2.00 for the charter fee for a local council of the I.C.I.R.I. along with the names of five paid-up sponsoring members.
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